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ABSTRACT

In North Dakota, the schools played the major role in imparting American culture to the immigrants who by 1920 numbered 67% of North Dakota's population, but rural schools were not ideally suited to the task. The immigrants tended to cluster in nationality groups in geographic areas of the state, giving communities distinct ethnic identities. The largest ethnic groups were comprised of Germans from Russia and Norwegians. The inability of teacher and immigrant student to communicate led to humorous, and occasionally traumatic, incidents. Although children struggled to use English in school lessons, they reverted to their native language when out of school. Some county superintendents, recognizing that students would learn English more rapidly if forced to use it on the playground, instructed teachers to forbid the speaking of any foreign language at school. Memorization and repetition were commonly used to teach English. Some schools also offered classes in English to adults. In addition to teaching English, the schools were charged with the responsibility of inspiring patriotism in the immigrants. Some immigrants retained strong cultural ties with the old country and viewed Americanization as corruption of traditional values. Many did not value education for their children. However, in time, the rural school Americanized the immigrants' children. (Author/CM)

COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY:

Humanities on the Frontier

THE COUNTRY SCHOOL AND THE AMERICANIZATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN NORTH DAKOTA

A Country School Legacy Essay

by

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Glenburn, North Dakota

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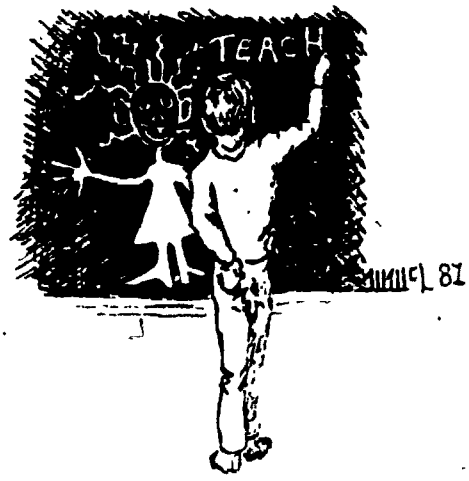

COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: HUMANITIES ON THE FRONTIER

The Mountain Plains Library Association is pleased to be involved in this project documenting the country school experience. Funding of this project from the National Endowment for the Humanities, cost sharing and other contributions enabled us all to work with the several state-based Humanities Committees as well as many other state and local libraries, agencies and interested citizens. We are deeply impressed not only by the enthusiasm for this work by all concerned but by the wealth of experience brought to bear in focusing attention on—and recapturing—this important part of history, and how we got here. This project seems to identify many of the roots and "character formation" of our social, political and economic institutions in the West.

Already the main Project objective seems to be met: stimulating library usage and increasing circulation of historical and humanities materials in this region. Public interest is rising in regional, state and local history. Oral history programs are increasing with greater public participation. The study of genealogy—and the search for this information—is causing much interest in consulting—and preserving—historical materials. What has been started here will not end with this project. The immediate results will tour the entire region and be available for any who wish the program, film, and exhibit. There will be more discussion of—and action on—the issues involving the humanities and public policies, past and present. The Mountain Plains Library Association is proud to be a partner in this work, the Country School Legacy, and its contribution to understanding humanities on the frontier.

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THE COUNTRY SCHOOL

AND THE AMERICANIZATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS

Various forces pushed and pulled immigrants from their native homeland to the northern plains. Whatever their reasons were--the desire for a new home in a new country, the promise of wealth, dissatisfaction with conditions in the old country or personal considerations--the immigrants moved into North Dakota rapidly and in astonishing numbers.

In 1890, one year after statehood, the foreign born comprised 43 per cent of the state's 191,000 people. The largest immigrant groups at that time were the Norwegians with 25,700 people, 23,000 Canadians, 9,000 Germans, 8,000 from England and Ireland, and 4,100 from Russia.[1]

By 1910 the foreign born and their children made up 71 per cent of the population, of which the largest group was the Norwegians with 125,000 closely followed by Germans with 117,000, about half of whom were Germans from Russia. At the end of the decade, during which settlement of the state was completed, the immigrants and their children numbered 432,000, or 67 per cent of the population. By this time, 1920, the Germans and the Germans from Russia were the most numerous ethnic group with 22 per cent of the population, compared to the Norwegians with 20 per cent.[2]

The immigrants tended to cluster in nationality groups in geographic areas of the state, giving communities distinct ethnic identities. The Norwegians, being the first large group of immigrants to arrive in the state, settled in the rich eastern counties and along the Great Northern Railroad line across northern North Dakota. The Germans from Germany concentrated in LaMoure County in southeastern North Dakota. Scottish and French settlers, most of whom came from Canada, settled in the northeast counties. Austrians occupied the rangeland in the southwestern counties.

Smaller groups of immigrants settled in pockets within the broad areas inhabited by the large immigrant groups. Bohemians developed a strong ethnic community in the Lidgerwood area. Jewish farming communities were established near Washburn, Regan, Wing, Devils Lake, and Dickinson. A strong Dutch community of about 80 families developed near Strasburg in Emmons County. Icelanders settled in Pembina County; Poles built communities in Walsh and Kidder counties. Ukranians homesteaded in substantial numbers in Billings, Dunn and McLean counties. German-Hungarians settled in Stark and Hettinger counties. Russians claimed the area around Butte in southern McHenry County.

If the areas that various nationalities settled in North Dakota were coded on a map, the final product would resemble a mosaic, but the mosaic would require subtle shading and detail. Swedes, Finns, a small colony of Syrians who erected near Ross the first Moslem mosque in the United States, Swiss, Estonians and others scattered themselves throughout the state.

In the midst of a settlement predominantly Norwegian, for example, would appear a family or more of Swiss, Germans, or Irish. These original ethnic settlements have, for the most part, persisted. Traveling north from Minot for twenty miles one will still find a grouping of Norwegians, then Bohemians, Swedes, and Norwegians again. Interspersed are Germans,

Germans from Russia, Finns, Danes and Latvians as well as older American stock. The whole made for a rich diversity of ethnic groups who were searching for a living and an identity in their new land.

To make a living farming or in the new towns was one challange for the immigrant; to acquire American culture was perhaps no less demanding. As a newly arrived Norwegian settler wrote in 1881:

> On the whole it seems to be a good deal easier to make a living; but there are many hardships connected with the life of a pioneer, especially at first. I should like to see you and the others come over, yet consider the matter twice before you leave the Fatherland and the place where your cradle stood. It is not a small matter.[3]

Spiritedly independent and materialistic, the immigrants arrived possessing traits that suited their new homeland and provided the basis for their move into the stream of American life. Although living and working in America made them part of the new country in a physical sense, years of observation, of informal and formal education were required before the immigrant would feel a part of the country in a cultural sense. The speed with which the immigrants did this varied among nationalities, families and individuals.

The school was the institution that played the major role, directly or indirectly, in imparting American culture to immigrants in North Dakota. In the company of fellow nationals, the immigrant observed the customs of the old country and spoke his native tongue at social gatherings and in church. Business and legal transactions required an interpreter if one's knowledge of the English language was insufficient, but such actions were not everyday affairs. The immigrants could cling to their traditions and language in North Dakota, but their children were required to attend school. The school placed the children in contact with other nationalities and with a teacher who instructed them in the English language and attempted to foster patriotism. As the children adopted American manners, their parents

gradually abandoned their ancestral loyalties. Where the child went, the adult followed.

Although the rural school was the primary Americanizing agent to immigrant farm families, it was not ideally suited to the task. Modeled on the "Little Red Schoolhouse" of New England, the rural school in North Dakota operated under very different conditions. Harsh winter weather and inadequate facilities forced short school terms, sometimes as little as 60 days or less in the early 1900's. The distance to school and the practise of some parents of keeping their children home to work produced irregular attendance. Teachers, who often had no knowledge of the language or culture of their pupils, added to the immigrant's difficulties.

Contemporary educational theorists such as John Dewey advocated using the cultural heritage of the community as the basis for education, but few rural schools did so. School curriculum gave slight attention to Scandanavian and German history and culture and none at all to the Germans from Russia. County school superintendents, generally Anglo-Americans, routinely referred to the Germans from Russia as "Russians" in their reports and decried the difficulties imposed upon education by the "foreign element" in their county. With a few exceptions, there was scant sympathy for the immigrants' attempts at cultural adaptation and little effort to relate education to their background.

The inability of teacher and immigrant student to communicate led to humorous, and occasionally traumatic, incidents. Guri Sand, who came to the Hatton area in 1892 with her Norwegian parents, began school with a male teacher who was convinced that the Norwegians inability to pronounce "j's" and "y's" correctly was simple disobediance. When he threatened to whip Guri's younger sister, the little girl became hysterical, behavior that the teacher assumed was meant to mock him. Guri restrained him from striking

the child; the teacher "came to his senses, and things were better after that." Ms. Sand recalls that the young man's poor teaching example filled her with determination to find a better method to instruct children. She received a teaching certificate upon graduation from eighth grade and subsequently continued her education at the University of North Dakota.[4]

Coming from a Danish home in Renville County, Mathilda Staael Smith entered school with three other children from her family, all unable to speak English. Her rural school had 30 pupils under one teacher, who was unable to give the Staael children the individual attention they required. Pupils who could speak and read English well were classed as "smart," the others were virtually ignored. The Staael's attended school regularly but had little comprehension of what they were being taught for three years.[5]

Icelandic students discovered that teachers frequently found their customs disturbing. Icelandic women retained their original family name after marriage, a practise some thought indecent. The Icelanders' patronymic system, meaning that a brother and sister had different surnames, annoyed some teachers who did not appreciate their ethnic traditions. Icelandic customs celebrating Ash Wednesday included one day similar to Halloween when children would collect sweets from adults. On Ash Wednesday it was customary to play practical jokes, the favorite being to pin a small bag of ashes to the back of a man's coat or trousers, the victim being unaware of his adornment. Once done to a dignified teacher in a predominantly Icelandic school, the pupils were severly punished for a prank that, in their culture, was acceptable humor.[6]

If the newcomers' cultures and traditions were not valued or appreciated, if the color and diversity they could have offered to the school were ignored, the oversight was probably the fault of the local teacher. Professional educators encouraged ethnic celebrations and community involvement in the school.

Laura Bassett and Alice Smith, two rural North Dakota teachers, published an attractive volume entitled Helpful Hints for the Rural Teacher in which they advised:

> If your district is a foreign one, be sure to have one of your very earliest programs, "A Program Of All Nations." Encourage the children to have parents bring pieces of all kinds of their native handwork, lovely Hardanger embroidery, Russian needlework, Italian hand carving. Put on folk dances in costume, encourage old folks to put on costumes, sing songs, play instruments. Let this night belong to the foreign patrons. Show your appreciation of their efforts and your admiration of their ability. Be sincere in this. The Old World has much to give to us that is really worth while and infinitely better than much of the tawdry jazz and bunkum we accept from each other these days.[7]

Mary Gallagher, Superintendent of Schools in Mercer County in 1896, reported that, "the population of Mercer County is almost entirely composed of the foreign element. Nevertheless," she added, "they have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded in the free schools and have made rapid progress considering the difficulties under which they labor, the first and principal one being their unacquaintance with the English language."[8]

Conscientious country school teachers struggled to overcome handicaps to teach English to the immigrant children. When the teacher could not speak the native tongue of the young pupils, an older student would sometimes serve as an interpretor. Still, the lack of a common language between teacher and pupil was the major problem retarding the child's educational progress. As one former student recalls:

> In those pioneer days, we did not need any fancy Normal School methods. Our trouble was that we did not understand the language of the textbooks. Frequently, when we asked the teacher to explain the meaning of words to us, he referred us to the dictionary and there we found ourselves entangled in a maze of words that had to meaning to us.[9]

When the teacher could speak the language of the students, English lessons and reading comprehension advanced more smoothly. The teacher in a rural school near the Icelandic settlement at Mountain was able to

translate the lessons in Appleton's First Reader into Icelandic and then slowly repeat the lesson in English. In this manner the students learned to read and comprehend English quite rapidly.[10]

Though children struggled to use English in school lessons, they happily reverted to their familiar language when out of school. This persisted for many years. As late as World War II, one teacher remembers that her students used more German language than English when not in school and that when in school, "they thought in German and spoke in English."[11]

Some county superintendents, recognizing that students would learn English more rapidly if they were forced to give it practical application on the playground, instructed teachers to forbid the speaking of any foreign language on the school grounds during noon hour and recess. This requirement placed a considerable burden on teachers in some localities. "In one German community," wrote rural teacher Mary Brophy, "I was expected to keep the pupils speaking English at recess, while at home they didn't dare speak English."[12] Many pupils learned more English at recess than in class, however, because the teacher's schedule was too crowded to permit giving much attention to non-English speaking children.[13]

The English-only rule also helped curb ethnic snobbery on the playground because cliques based upon nationality were discouraged. In a McHenry County school, one former pupil remembers that when she started school, "the Norwegians chose to play on the east side of the school and the German-Russians on the west side, speaking our own language. But the teacher soon put a stop to that. We had to play together, and no fighting was allowed."[14] In a Burke County school where the rule was not enforced, Danish children segregated themselves. A non-Danish fellow student recalls childish anger

because the Danes "spoke Danish in front of us, but we understood our names and assumed they were making fun of us."[15]

Teaching a group of students who spoke a foreign tongue made large demands upon young, inexperienced teachers. "I had thirteen French speaking pupils, all grades but the first and seventh," wrote one teacher. "I was very shy and did most of my teaching from the back of the room. The children spoke French at school to one another. Their comprehension of English was very poor; school was difficult for pupils and teacher."[16]

Beginning teacher Clara Jacobs worked with extraordinary patience to instruct a Norwegian boy who refused to speak a word of English. She kept him after school to work on the language--requiring his uncooperative older sister to act as interpreter; she visited the parents and insisted that they encourage him to learn English. A shy grin, but no words, was his only response to weeks of effort. Finally, in the midst of another unproductive session, she grasped the boy by the shoulders and shook him vigorously. The incident troubled her so greatly that she had nightmares about it, until, two days later, the child began to respond and soon began speaking English.[17]

Memorization and frequent repitition were the methods commonly used to teach English. In Frances Hitz's childhood home, only Czech was spoken. The little English she knew upon starting school came from her older sisters and brothers who attended school before her and occasionally used an English word. Her first grade teacher, who had come from a Norwegian immigrant family, knew no Czech at all. "How I managed to learn to read, write, and think in English that first year," she wrote, "I do not know. I memorized the Rose Primer until I knew each page by heart, and to this day I can close my eyes and see each page, the word or words, and pictures that were above the words."[18]

Teacher Bertha Essler used an innovative method to induce her German-Russian pupils to take an interest in English lessons. Through a student interpretor she would discover what the children discussed at recess; then she would ask the children to discuss the same topic in English. By sketching objects, writing simple sentences and phrases on the balckboard, and requiring the children to participate in the lessons, her pupils were able to speak passable English by the term's end.[19]

Dolores Bertsch Pfeifer asked her German speaking pupils to draw an object on the blackboard. "One wanted to draw a gutch (duck), the other wanted to draw a kraut (cabbage head). I then had them learn what it was called in English. They were quick to learn, even ... the playground because it was not allowed to speak a foreign language on the school ground."[20]

Students who did learn English well and rapidly, like Ida Romsos, daughter of Norwegian immigrants who settled near Crosby, were motivated by a desire to be progressive and blend into their new country as quickly as possible. "I was determined that I wasn't going to be one of those who couldn't speak the American language. I decided that no way can I let that happen. It didn't take long until I learned it."[21] Alida Siverson, the eldest child in a Norwegian farm family in Williams County, was eager to learn English in her school. She in turn taught the language to her younger siblings during evenings.[22]

Other immigrant children found the first days of school frightening. Julia Rindel, from a Belgian family near Crosby, resisted going to school, but was persuaded to enter the first grade at age 14. Three weeks later she was advanced to the third grade, but still had no comprehension of the lessons. To ease the boredom of lessons she could not understand, she brought needlepoint work with her to school. The teacher soon banned the needlepoint

and began spending extra time with Julia, taking her to the school window and pointing to objects outside and naming them in English. Under that kind of pressure, and with her French language background to aid her learning English, she obtained her eighth grade diploma in two years and went on to attend college and teach in rural schools. Her pronounciation was improved by a neighboring farm wife with pedagogic inclinations.[23]

The school also spread a knowledge of English language among adult immigrants. Mary Barr Wilson, who homesteaded with her husband and children near Larimore in 1883, used a corner of a large granary on the farm to tutor her children. A German neighbor brought his little daughters to join in the lessons and often remained to listen. Soon both he and his daughters learned English.[24]

Some adults attended the schools expressly to learn English. Teaching at a rural school near Granville in 1910, Maude Youngs Carlson enrolled a 19-year-old Norwegian woman who walked to school to learn English. At another school a young Norwegian man attended the primary reading classes. He was polite but caused Ms. Youngs some consternation by leaving the school during periods between reading lessons to stand outside and smoke.[25] Several teachers recall that the adult students were occasionally disrespectful to demonstrate that they were not to be ordered about by a young teacher simply because she happened to know English.[26]

Some accomodating teachers held special evening sessions for adults who wished to learn to speak and read English. Delrey Webster instructed a 40-year-old Swede in English during recess and often held spelling bees in the evening for adults who wished to sharpen their language skills.[27]

Motives of adult students were sometimes more than purely academic. Some of the young male homesteaders who attended school hoped to improve their social life as well as their English by dating the teacher. A number were successful on both counts. Many so called "school marms" became "farm wives," making marriage a prolific source of Americanization.

Pupils who learned English would impart some of it to their parents. In an age before radio and television, conversation dominated the evening hours, and children related their experiences at school and spoke of what they had learned about their new country. Teacher Winifred Erdman boarded in a rural home and saw the effects of her teaching being passed on. "Little Elsie Buchholz would come home every night with her book, sit on her Dad's lap in the evening and read to him. Oh, that was the nicest thing. He was so proud that that little girl could read. He was learning right there too."[28]

The Icelanders, whose cultural heritage placed great emphasis upon teaching children to read and write in their homes, took a lively interest in education and often probed their children as to what they had learned each day. Particular attention was given to American history, which sometimes occasioned controversy. In one family an argument developed over the wisdom of the Boston Tea Party, with one faction holding that the colonists' bold action was correct, another maintaining that it would have been more sensible to take the tea home and drink it rather than waste it. The grandfather took a more lofty view, claiming that if the colonists really wanted to disturb authorities, they would have thrown the coffee overboard.[29]

Rural schools helped Americanize the immigrant settlers because they brought a teacher into the community who usually boarded with one of the

families. The teacher was expected to be active in community life, including social and church activities. Millie Morse boarded with a German-Russian family in 1926 and felt segregated at first, her meals being served to her in a separate room. A friendship soon developed, however, and when a daughter of the family married, Millie was given the honor of waiting on the bride's table.[30] Julia Noraker, boarding in a German home, was called downstairs on her first night in her new lodging to discover a group of neighbors, none of whom spoke English, on hand to inspect her, an experience that disturbed her. She, too, developed a warm relationship with her hosts in time.[31]

C. L. Robertson, teaching in a French community, was frequently called upon to help French adults fill out catalog orders. Serena Strand, who taught in a German community near Jamestown, attended the local church and participated in the German language service. She learned considerable German and developed mutual respect between the teacher and area residents.[32]

Women teachers were always in demand at social functions in rural areas with bachelor homesteaders, regardless of their nationality. Belle Berg, teaching in a Scandanavian community near Ross in 1911, had many suitors and attended a few square dancing parties where the small number of women, including herself, were "whirled hither and yon until dizzy." She boarded with a Norwegian family where neither parent spoke English and all communication was through the children.[33]

Settlers on the prairie had built their social groups and churches around nationalities, but at school functions the ethnic groups had an opportunity to mingle. Despite the tendency for nationalities to settle

land in blocks, schools were rarely made up of only one nationality. At the rural schools they met and learned about each other as well as acquiring American culture. Oscar Oium, who attended a ruarl school near Towner, often exchanged his lunch with a German boy. He recalls enjoying the sausage and the heavy German cake, while the German youth was fond of Oium's Norwegian lefse and rulla pulsa.[34] Mrs. Frank Hitz remembers that even though she could not speak English well, she would entertain the teacher and younger pupils with Czechoslovakian folk tales she had learned from her mother.[35] Gladys Webster asserts that 26 different nationalities or combinations thereof attended school with her in Dunn County. She believes the children were motivated to learn English so that they could communicate with each other.[36]

Learning English was merely the first step in the Americanization of immigrant children in the rural schools. The state constitution charged the public schools with "the teaching of patriotism, integrity, and morality."[37] In reading and social studies lessons the pupils were exposed to America's heroes and were presumably inspired to develop a feeling of loyalty and protectiveness toward their adopted country.

Efforts to inspire patriotism were not limited to school classes. "Yankee Doodle," "The Star Spangled Banner," and "America the Beautiful," as well as the "Marine Hymn" were favorite songs in school-centered gatherings. In 1896, Superintendent of Public Instruction Emma Bates informed the governor and legislature that flags should be flown "from every schoolhouse in this state where we have so large a proportion of foreign population. It is a sad sight to an American heart," she continued, "to see audiences called upon to sing the National Air sit indifferently and perhaps only now and then one knowing the words or joining in the melody."[38]

On Columbus Day in 1892 patriotic school exercises were planned for every school in the state, whether the school was currently in session or not. The state superintendent urged county superintendents and teachers to get local residents to lay aside ordinary labor and " give exclusive attention to this grand holiday of the nation." The flag was to be raised accompanied by ringing bells at every school across the state and nation. The celebration, the state superintendent asserted, "will afford the long coveted opportunity for impressing upon the minds and hearts of our children and youth, both native American and those of foreign birth or parentage, those lessons of patriotism and sacred regard for the laws and institutions of our common country, that shall constitute a stronger protection than fleets of war and standing armies."[39]

American Evenings, a lecture series sponsored by the State Department of Public Instruction, featured popular lectures on patriotic themes in small towns across the state. Rural schools were also urged to connect their Memorial Day exercises with those of veterans groups. Books that would engender a love of country, such as Morgan's Patriotic Citizenship--said to foster the "most unselfish patriotism and noblest citizenship"--were available to country schools through the County Superintendent of Schools office.[40]

Added pressure to inculcate patriotism and aid the nation faced the rural school during war time. Leila Ewen realled how World War I affected her school:

> World War I kind of shook the school, shook the curriculum, shook the teaching, shook everything because the interest of the people was all on the war. We sold Liberty Bonds, we sold stamps, we did everything we possibly could for the soldiers. We put on all kinds of programs. The kiddies made their own programs.... The school was the social gathering place. They asked us teachers to put on plays to raise money. Raising money for the war effort besides teaching was a hard job.[41]

In one Wells County school the children adopted a soldier overseas, usually a local boy, and wrote to him faithfully. The children were rewarded for their attention with souveniers from their adopted soldiers.[42]

World War I had ugly ramifications for the German and German from Russia immigrants in some communities. German speaking immigrants were accused of being sympathetic to the Axis powers and disloyal to America. Some school children taunted their peers who had a German background, leading to hostility on the playground. In McIntosh County prominent businessman John Wishek, a friend of the German-Russian settlers and a man proud of his German heritage, was indicted under the Espionage Act. During a three week trial it was demonstrated that prosecution witnesses bore private grudges against Wishek, and the charges were finally dropped. In Cass County a local rural school board was criticized for failing to buy an American flag. Angered by the fuss that developed over the matter, school board president Henry Von Bank told the teacher that he would as soon see a pair of trousers flying over the school as the flag of the United States. Von Bank's inappropriate remark led to his conviction under the Espionage and Sedition acts, although the judge in the case directed a not guilty verdict.[43]

The extent to which the war affected the rural schools is difficult to gauge, but the war undoubtedly put pressure on the immigrant families to learn English and demonstrate their loyalty to America. It was during this period that Mathilda Staael Smith's parents abandoned their native Danish and began speaking English in their home.[44] In some areas church services began being held in English. Immigrant families across the state bought Liberty Bonds, which the rural schools promoted.

During World War II the schools were once again called upon to assist the national effort by promoting bond sales and conservation practices. After the Pearl Harbor attack the schools assisted in registering young men under the Selective Service Act. Inculcating the principles of democracy and impressing loyalty to the nation a' its constitution be'me salient features of a rural school education.[45]

The teacher and the school were not welcomed enthusiastically in every community. Some immigr nts retained strong cultural identities with the old country and viewed Americanization as corruption of trad'tional values. The Germans from Russia tended to resist Americanization and place less emphasis upon educ tion than any other major nationality. Their experiences in Russia, where the government had reniged on promises made to them when they began migrating from Germany to the Black Sea area in the mid-eighteenth century, made them suspicious of government and somewhat clannish. They were loyal to their community and family, thrifty, hard working, almost fiercly materialistic in their desire to make a success of their new life on the northern plains. Attending school was not considered as important as working at home or on the farm.

There were numerous Germans from Russia who did value education and supported the schools, but the school terms in their communities were the shortest, absentee rates the highest, and teachers frequently the least trained and poorest paid. As late as 1938 a teacher in rural Grant County entered a school where none of the German-Russian children knew English, nor even the order of letters in the alphabet. By the end of the year she had succeeded in awakening their interest in learning, but their native tongue remained in use outside of school.[46]

Louise Jevne, teaching in a German-Russian community in Mercer County in 1937, received letters from parents requesting that their children learn English. She had older pupils translate the first reader, word by word, and drill it into beginners. The first eighth grade graduation in the school's history was celebrated during her tenure at that rural school. She and other teachers believe that the women wanted their children to be educated; the men wanted them home to work.[47]

County school superintendents often decried the immigrant's lack of attention to education. In McIntosh and Morton counties, both heavily German-Russian, county school superintendents complained that nearly all the rural school district officers were foreigners who could not keep school records and seemed to have little interest in learning to do so. Several county superintendents lamented the immigrants' reluctance to send their children to school and suggested that the state provide for stricter enforcement of the truancy law.[48]

The compulsory attendance law was commonly flouted because there was no state official to enforce it. Parents who wished their children to avoid the school's influence or to remain home to work could falsify the child's age (only those age 8 through 14 had to attend) or simply not send the child to school. They were seldom reprimanded because only a school official, who was likely to be a neighboring farmer, would report truancy. Neil C. Macdonald, State Superintendent of Schools in 1910, attempted to persuade officials to enforce the law. He was a strong advocate of education and struggled sincerely to upgrade rural schools and to improve the attendance. Regarding nonattendance of farm boys, he wrote in his 1910 report: "Back of this sordid business is contempt

for law and back of this is the lust for money--is the belief in the ignoble sentiment, 'that money makes the man.' And so we have many thousand farms with broad and well-tilled fields as the price of many thousand boys with narrow and ill-trained minds."[49]

There were some successful enforcements of the truancy law. Morton County Superintendent W. F. Lorin reported that when the Germans in the county were informed of the compulsory attendance law, they conscientiously sent their children to school "out of respect for law and experience with strict laws in their mother country."[50]

In some districts hostility to the school made it nearly impossible to find a boarding place for the teacher. Belle Berg was taken to the home of a Norwegian Lutheran pastor who had agreed to board the teacher near a rural Mountrail County school. When the pastor discovered that she did not speak Norwegian, he ordered her to leave immediately. Kidder County Superintendent Orra Hurd reported in 1910 that it was very difficult to obtain teachers for eight schools in German-Russian districts because boarding places could not be found. Permits had to be issued to untrained local people in order to supply the school with a teacher. Similar situations were common in other counties.[51]

Maude Youngs Carlson, who taught a number of different nationalities in different schools over the years, observed that it took several years in this country before the newcomers recognized the importance of learning the English language and American culture. For the first few years the immigrants believed it was acceptable if their children learned English, but they believed learning the native tongue was more important. Time, she believes, led to a realization that the mother country was a memory that

could not be recreated in North Dakota. The children who had little or no recollection of their parent's native land learned English language and acquired more of the trappings of American life as they grew older. Many of them became ashamed of their parent's brogue and tired of hearing stories of the old country. The rural school had set them on a course that made them American in speech and outlook; only their nationality remained Old World.

NOTES

[1]Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Omaha: U. of Neb. Press, 1966), p. 146.

[2]Ibid., pp. 282-83.

[3]Omon B. Herigstad, "The First Norwegian Settlement in Griggs County," North Dakota Historical Society Collections (1906), p. 138.

[4]Marie Mynster Feidler, In Retrospect, Teaching in North Dakota: Recollections of Retired Teachers (Grand Forks: Retired Teachers Assoc. 1976), pp. 176-77.

[5]Renville County History, Renville County Old Settler's Association, 1[illegible]6, pp. 306-07.

[6]Thorstina Walters, Modern Sagas: The Story of Icelanders in North America (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1953), p. 135.

[7]Laura Bassett and Alice Smith, Helpful Hints for the Rural Teacher (Valley City: Bassett and Smith, 1924), p. 60.

[8]Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Public Documents of North Dakota, 1896, p. 265.

[9]Walters, Modern Sagas, p. 105.

[10]Ibid., p. 103.

[11]Letter from Mrs. Frank Hitz, New Rockford, N.D. Feb. 18, 1981.

[12]In Retrospect, p. 145. Biennial Report, 1898, p. 259.

[13]Letter from Vera McCombs Fairbrother, Towner, N.D. Feb. 22, 1981.

[14]Letter from Lillian Church, Leeds, N.D. March 5, 1981.

[15]Letter from Bruce Ormiston, Bowbells, N.D. Feb. 22, 1981.

[16]In Retrospect, pp. 179-80.

[17]Letter from Clara Jacobs, Stanley, N.D. Feb. 22, 1981.

[18]Letter from Mrs. Frank Hitz, New Rockford, N.D. Feb. 18, 1981.

[19]Letter from Bertha Essler, Kenmare, N.D. Feb. 25, 1981.

[20]Letter from Dolores Bertsch Pfeifer, Harvey, N.D. Feb. 25, 1981.

[21]Interview with Ida Romsos, Crosby, ND. Jan. 19, 1981.

NOTES (Continued)

[22]Interview with Alida Siverson, Williston, N.D. Jan. 14, 1981.

[23]Interview with Julia Rindal, Crosby, N.D. Jan. 19, 1981.

[24]Letter from Mary Barr Wilson, Dunseith, N.D. Feb. 15, 1981.

[25]Interview with Maude Youngs Carlson, Minot, N.D. Nov. 18, 1980.

[26]Interview with Bernard Solberg, Minot, N.D. Dec. 3, 1980.

[27]Interview with Olivene Koppang, Williston, ND. Jan. 19, 1981.
Interview with Gladys and Delrey Webster, Killdeer, N.D. Jan. 15, 1981.

[28]Interview with Winifred Erdman, Minot, N.D. Nov. 19, 1981.

[29]Walters, Modern Sagas, p. 105.

[30]In Retrospect, p. 129.

[31]Ibid., p. 130.

[32]Ibid., p. 175.

[33]Letter from Phyllis Campbell, Dunseith, N.D. Feb. 15, 1981.

[34]Interview with Oscar Olum, Towner, N.D. Jan. 6, 1981.

[35]Letter from Mrs. Frank Hitz, New Rockford, N.D. Feb. 18, 1981.

[36]Interview with Gladys and Delrey Webster, Killdeer, N.D. Jan. 15, 1981.

[37]Biennial Reports, 1896, p. 16.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Biennial Reports, 1892, p. 592.

[40]Ibid., 1892, p. 12. 1896, p. 144. 1900, p. 65.

[41]In Retrospect, p. 206.

[42]Letter from Mrs. Frank Hitz, New Rockford, N.D. Feb. 18, 1981.

[43]Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 366-67. In Retrospect, p. 175.

[44]In Retrospect, p. 179.

[45]Frank W. Cyr (ed.), Rural Schools and the War (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1944), p. 1.

[46]In Retrospect, p. 180.

[47]Interview with Louise Jevne, Lansford, N.D. Nov. 20, 1980.
Interview with Gladys Webster and Delrey Webster, Killdeer, N.D. Jan. 15, 1981.

[48]Biennial Reports, 1896, pp. 248, 265, 273. 1898, p. 239.

[49]Neil C. Macdonald, Rural School Progress (Bismarck: Department of Public Instruction, 1910), p. 20.

[50]Biennial Reports, 1910, p. 204.

[51]Ibid., p. 198.